

# Christmas help for families

## *Toy giveaway spreads holiday cheer in Fairless community*

Amy L. Knapp

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**BREWSTER** With eight children to care for, Rebecca Harris was in line two and half hours before the Fairless Food Cupboard opened Thursday morning.

She wanted to be one of the first served at the grocery giveaway in order to get a voucher for the toy giveaway going on just a block from the food cupboard.

The annual Fairless toy distribution provides gifts for children from birth to age 16 who live in the Fairless Local School District.

Harris said the toy handout will help provide a good Christmas for the children, which include two of her own and six nieces and nephews who also live with her and her husband, Gerald.

"My husband has a good job. He works his butt off, but it is hard," said the Navarre mom of providing for her large family.

The haul she brought home Thursday will go a long way to making Christmas bright.

## **Helping hand**

The toy distribution is sponsored through the Fairless Food Cupboard, which holds a monthly food giveaway for community members.

Darlene Reed has been involved in the toy drive for many years. Her mom, Dorothy Groff, helped start the program in the late 1980s.

A group of churches, Reed said, saw the need and responded by distributing food and then later toys and clothing to help community members get by.

"Before that I remember people would stop by and ask for help. My mom would go to the grocery store and buy food," she said.

Area churches as well as organizations and community members continue to support the toy giveaway through donations of toys and money to fund the project.

Last year, about 300 children received items during the distribution. The group has no idea how many will walk through the door this year for help.

An hour into the giveaway on Thursday, about 100 kids had received gifts.

In order to qualify, families had to first visit the food pantry. This month, families got a turkey and side dishes for Thanksgiving dinner along with other staples.

Families coming to the toy drive were able to select toys for each child as well as books, stuffed animals, blankets and hats and scarves.

The Navarre Salvation Army provided pajamas and Fairless Helping Fairless and the Fairless Alumni Association gave each child a new pillow and a pillowcase embroidered with "Fairless Falcons" as well as books.

Reed said this year, the group had collected more items than it has in its history.

"It's just amazing," Reed said. "We have community members, churches, and other volunteers here helping to put together the toys, set everything up and then help the families as they come in."

Harris was pleased with the gifts she was able to pick up for the children, ranging in age from 18 months to 14. Her oldest son, 17, wasn't eligible for the giveaway.

The stay-at-home mom said the gifts are beyond what she and her husband could have supplied under the tree.

Parents could choose from interactive toys, Nerf guns, Cinderella's carriage and Barbie dolls. There were sleds, stuffed animals, drones and styling tools. Books also were available along with many other toys.

Harris plans to get the kids some other smaller gifts in addition to the items she picked out Thursday.

"Only two are mine, but I have a big heart," she said. "It's hard to supply everyone with gifts but this really helps. Even if they didn't have all of this for Christmas the kids would be fine. They love being together, but this makes it a little merrier."